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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics
RURAL NEWSPAPERS RECORD ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITIES ON THE
FARM PRODUCTION FRONT, JANUARY - MARCH 1943 *

Reserve

General Statement

This analysis 1/ covers clippings from 21 2/ rural weekly newspapers for the period December 20, 1942 through March 13, 1943. Specifically, it is limited to the over-all agricultural production picture. Attitudes toward production goals and problems facing farmers in meeting such goals as they are expressed in the editorial opinion of these rural papers together with the activities surrounding the production mobilization campaign as it was manifested in the individual rural communities 3/ and recorded in the news columns of the papers are the principal considerations of this report.

The County Newspapers Express Themselves

The editorial columns of the papers as a whole indicated an awareness of the production problems facing the farmer and tended to dwell not only upon the general production picture but also on the specific problem of the shortage of farm labor. Two thirds of the papers carried from one to four editorials each during this period on farm production. This awareness of the farm problems was in no way localized by a particular section

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1/ This is the initial report based on the war period survey of sample rural weekly newspapers. Other such reports are planned at intervals. Each report will attempt to consider the issues uppermost in the minds of the farmers and most frequently discussed and written up by the rural weeklies for a particular period.

2/ Actually the newspaper study as such is to be based on 24 rural weeklies throughout the war period. This particular report, however, will be limited to 21 since the papers are not all yet available for this period. Even for the 21 there is not a complete file in every case; there is, however, a sufficient number upon which to base such a report. The papers are: Los Banos Enterprise, Merced County, Calif.; Greensboro Herald-Journal, Greene County, Ga.; Valdosta Times, Lowndes County, Ga.; Aberdeen Times, Bingham County, Ida.; Knightstown Banner, Henry County, Ind.; Jewell Record, Hamilton County, Ia.; Cynthia Log Cabin, Harrison County, Ky.; Charlotte Republican-Tribune, Laton County, Mich.; Salem News, Dent County, Mo.; Seward Blue Valley Blade, Seward County, Nebr.; Meredith News, Belknap County, New Hamp.; Salem Sunbeam, Salem County, N.J.; San Miguel County Star, San Miguel County, N.M.; Boonville Herald, Oneida County, N.Y.; Latimer County News-Democrat, Latimer County, Okla.; Brady Standard, McCulloch County, Tex.; Rockbridge County News, Rockbridge County, Va.; Camas Post-Record, Clark County, Wash.; Clay County Free Press, Clay County, W.Va.; Pellen Record, Ashland County, Wisc.; Basin Republican-Rustler, Big Horn County, Wyo.

3/ Communities as they are spoken of in this report refer to the trade area covered by the rural weeklies.

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but rather was apparent all over the country. Editorials more or less ran the gamut of opinion on the farm production situation. As a whole, they were critical of the Government policy in relation to the farm problem, and were particularly concerned with the shortage of farm labor. Many expressed the seriousness of the farm problem and were pessimistic regarding the production outlook in the face of the obstacles confronting the farmers. Most of them, however, took the attitude that the goals had to be met and that the farmers would do everything within their power to meet them.

The attitudes expressed in these editorials can best be highlighted for the reader by short but pertinent and more or less typical quotations from them.

A number of the editorials tended to discuss the farm problem in general. Speaking along these lines, one editorial read:

"It is pretty generally agreed that the less he (the farmer) is regulated the more he will produce. Therefore, some good, concentrated effort should be devoted to alleviating or straightening out the regulations. And the effort should be confined to a few rifle-shot bulls-eyes rather than a dispersed shotgun barrage of excess and futile talk."

Salem Sunbeam (Salem Co., N.J.) Mar. 3, 1943.

Another remarked:

"...the farmer is about the only class of people that is not striking all the time.... When the farmer takes back his farm and operates it as he once did, then he will thrive.... You can't farm with a lead pencil and paper, even in Washington."

Salem News (Dent Co., Mo.) Jan. 21, 1943;

Mar. 11, 1943.

Speaking of AAA, still another editorial said:

"These fellows have preached the 'kill pig'... 'plow under'... 'produce less' programs so long that their 'about face now, in the time of necessity, has not too weighty an effect. Give the farmer help, machinery, gas, and rubber and he will produce."

Knightstown Banner (Henry Co., Ind.) Feb. 26, 1943.

Another paper maintained that the president of a leading farm organization hit the "crux of the food problem" when he said:

"There has been failure on the food front. That failure can be traced to the failure of administrative agencies... Now these same people express great concern over food shortages. They have not yet worked out with farm organizations a sound program based

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on the knowledge of farmers and their organizations." The editorial maintained that "subsidies and laws will not create food. Only the farmers can do that, and they need manpower, machinery, and stability of government policies which will encourage production instead of keeping it in a constant state of confusion."

Basin Republican-Hustler (Big Horn Co., Wyo.)
Mar. 4, 1943.

In expressing its community's determination to meet its production goals despite increasingly difficult conditions, one editorial read:

"Even though we have lost a large number of our farmers, most of them are not the most stable and successful ones. It is the opinion of various farmers, farm workers and farm agencies that as a whole the efficiency of the farmers who will stay on the farm during the emergency will improve sufficiently to offset the loss of farmers who have gone into other work."

Latimer Co. News-Democrat (Latimer Co., Okla.)
Jan. 7, 1943.

Taking a more optimistic attitude than most in view of the increased income of farmers, another editorial concluded:

"All in all, prospects for 1943 on the farms are good. Of course there will be some difficulties to be overcome and farm operations may not be as pleasant in some respects as in other years. But, there should be compensations that will offset the handicaps."

Valdosta Times (Lowndes Co., Ga.) Feb. 11, 1943.

Many of the editorials concerned themselves with the farm labor situation. They stressed the seriousness of the labor shortage and tended to criticize the government's farm labor policy or rather the failure of the government to have such a policy. As one editorial put it:

"The big (manpower) problem will not be solved until an over-all authority works out proper proportions and allocations between the essential activities."

Rockbridge Co. News (Rockbridge Co., Va.)
Mar. 11, 1943.

Still another editorial from the same paper maintained:

"There was too little planning in the country at large as to farm labor."

Rockbridge Co. News (Rockbridge Co., Va.)
Jan. 21, 1943.

A warning is contained in the following:

"But the capacity for production is limited by the supply of labor."

... Unless manpower can be assured agricultural operations in New Mexico, its production of vital foods will be sharply curtailed."

San Miguel Co. Star (San Miguel Co., N.M.)

Feb. 4, 1943.

Probably the most significant editorial of the group on farm labor was entitled, "It's Your Farm Problem." It pointed out that the acute farm labor shortage could be greatly alleviated if the communities themselves would realize that it was their own particular problem and that they must solve it themselves. It maintained that the community working as an integrated whole and aware of its responsibility can go a long way in meeting the critical farm labor shortage. It read in part:

"With a will to solve the problem, thinking citizens can go a long way toward solving it; each in his own home community.... The urgent thing that this community can do is to try to locate the available help -- the unemployed persons, men, women, boys, girls, young or old, who can step in and do their part.... The...point to be recognized is that This Is Our Problem, yours and mine; just as it is our war to be won and our Nation and our principles to be protected.... The problem is not merely one of adjusting price and wage levels, but clearly involves the all-round morale of the public. People in all walks of life must be made to realize the urgency of sticking to their job, whatever it may be and whatever the obstacles, hardships, and unpleasantness. This is no more than is required of the men in the armed forces. Developing this realization on the part of workers, farmers, businessmen, the public generally, is clearly a challenge for local thought and local leadership.... And above all, the farmers and the citizens at large, expect the legislators and administrators who have the responsibility for fixing prices, wages and controlling manpower to act with wisdom in keeping with the gravity of their task."

Salem Sunbeam (Salem Co., N.J.) Feb. 24, 1943.

A relatively small amount of the editorial comment in the papers was concerned with the shortage of farm machinery and feed. One paper complained thus:

"Then a munitions plant needs a die or new gadget everything is done and done promptly to supply the needed item, but everywhere farm tools quotas are down far below a margin of safety."

Charlotte Republican-Tribune (Eaton Co., Mich.)

Feb. 5, 1943.

A community in Texas faced with a very acute feed shortage carried these potent community personals in its paper:

"I'm sure the 'bureaucrats' at Washington know very little of the West Texas stock problems.... "In this section of the State ranchers

must have FEED to produce more food for FREEDOM." "Having to use men hours, tires and gasoline and haul such small amounts was bad enough, but now the men are having to leave home in the evening and spend the night in line JUST TO TRY to get feed the next day. The cost of the trip and supper and breakfast (if they get any) make the price of the feed almost prohibitive. Some of the men have been sick from exposure and are too worn out to do their work properly."

Brady Standard (McCulloch Co., Texas) Feb. 19,
1943; Feb. 26, 1943.

Another county in Oklahoma faced with the same acute feed shortage remarked:

"Here seems to be an opportunity for one or more of the farm set-ups to render valuable service to the people."

Latimer County News-Democrat (Latimer Co., Okla.)
Mar. 11, 1943.

Other editorials touched upon miscellaneous aspects of the farm problem. One criticized the price supports on pork and the ceiling on butter, maintaining that the low cost of butter and milk produce was resulting in the slaughtering of dairy cattle. Another pointed out that with the type of land in the county the greatest contribution its farmers could make to the war would be to raise their own food. Two papers carried editorials criticizing their allotments.

Critical Problems Face the Farmers. What are the Rural
Communities Doing About Farm Labor, Machinery and
Feed Shortage?

Labor

Principal problems facing the farmer in meeting his production goals were farm labor shortages; a scarcity of farm machinery, feed, fertilizer; and finally the matter of transportation. Certainly the most acute problem, if the amount of emphasis placed upon it by the papers is any criterion, was that of the shortage of farm labor. It was significant that for every Farm Mobilization Day meeting reported, the farm labor situation was the subject most frequently discussed. Likewise, most meetings which had anything to do with the farm production picture at least touched upon the labor problem, if not making it their main theme.

The seriousness of the farm labor situation was also made known in the various papers through editorials; discussions at meetings of chambers of commerce, other civic clubs and farm organizations; work that certain organizations such as the 4-H clubs, Future Farmers of America, American Women Volunteer Service and Boy and Girl Scouts were doing on the farm labor problem; and the activities of the schools and such federal agencies as the USFS, USDA War Boards, Defense Councils, and FSA.

Although certain areas seemed to be more critically in need of labor than others, the problem of farm labor as such seemed to be facing farmers in all of the counties from which papers were read. Most of the papers read for this period carried an article, or a number of articles, dealing with the farm labor shortage.

Only two communities, Salem, New Jersey, and Bingham, Idaho, were getting down to bedrock in handling their farm labor problem by a community approach -- i.e., the community itself was recognizing its responsibility in the matter and was attempting to do something about it.

In Salem, a community forum on the acute local labor problem was held at the county courthouse under the auspices of the local American Legion Post. This meeting had a threefold purpose -- (1) to acquaint the city inhabitant with his rural neighbors' problems, (2) to discuss the local farm problem and possible remedies, and (3) to stress that a farmer is just as much a patriot as a soldier. Problems discussed in connection with the farm labor situation included the inability of the farmer to compete with industry in acquiring help, the drawbacks of daylight saving time to the farmer's efficiency, the Monday morning hangover, that is, the question of closing local bars on Sunday to raise the efficiency of farm hands, dismissing schools throughout the harvest season, and finally the organization of a delivery service for farmers which would save them "precious time on necessary trips to town." In addition it was suggested that a local cleaning house be established which would place volunteer workers on the farm and which would work with any city groups who volunteered to spend their free time in this manner. A committee was appointed to cooperate with farm organization representatives in setting up machinery whereby industrial workers of the community could spend their vacations working on farms.

In one community in Bingham County (Idaho) the local farm labor shortage of the canning crop season was being tackled by the local chamber of commerce and other civic organizations in their attempt to obtain a labor camp for needed migrant labor which was being recruited by the Government. Concerted effort had assured such a camp for this community. Maintaining that "this is a community problem and a benefit to every farmer in this section," the chamber of commerce committee had decided to set up a community fund to pay for the expense not assumed by the Government in bringing these laborers to the community. Every farmer in the community was asked to contribute to this fund on the basis of 5¢ per acre and the businessmen and other interested people were to donate. "The committee believes that only by cooperation and united effort of the entire community can the labor problem be solved equitably."

Other communities were approaching the problem. In two papers discussions were reported on the practicability of lengthening the school week to six days and thus have longer vacations which could be used to an advantage by rural children who are needed to help on the farms. One community reported the holding of a "harvest vacation", that is, children being dismissed during critical harvest seasons. Very little mention was made of women working on the farms to help alleviate the labor shortage.

Other Problems Harassing Farmers

Next to farm labor the problem which seemed to concern farmers most was the scarcity of farm machinery. It, too, was discussed in considerable detail in all of the meetings which were held in relation to the production mobilization campaign and the farmer seemed to look upon it as the second most serious threat to the successful fulfillment of production goals. The most significant approach that was being made to this problem in the communities was the holding of farm machinery repair courses in conjunction with the war production training programs sponsored by the Office of Education. Nine communities were planning or conducting such repair courses and in all the communities in which such courses were being held farmers were urged to attend and were attending in considerable numbers. This project seemed to be the only community action that was being taken to alleviate the farm machinery shortage. It should be pointed out that a number of the courses sponsored in the war production training program are commodity courses concerned with increasing the production of poultry, dairy, livestock and the like. Such courses were being planned or were being held in seven of the communities.

The Production Mobilization Campaign for 1943

The United States Department of Agriculture launched the 1943 Food for Victory Campaign by sponsoring a formalized production mobilization campaign.

This campaign involved farmer meetings to be held in observance of Farm Mobilization Day, January 12, a 4-H Mobilization Week, February 6-13; and the celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the founding of the National Farm Program by National Farm Day meetings on March 8. The various phases of this campaign as it was observed in the individual communities was highlighted in the rural weekly newspapers during the first three months of 1943 by news articles and editorial opinion.

Newspapers Report Farmer Participation in Mobilization Day Meetings on January 12.

In December, President Roosevelt set January 12, 1943 as Farm Mobilization Day, the official act which set the all-out production mobilization campaign rolling. This day the farmers of America were to plan the mobilization of their resources for the important but increasingly difficult task of feeding not only our armed forces and civilian population but meeting our lend-lease commitments as well. In a proclamation in which he stressed the importance of the farmers' task to our war effort, the President asked farmers to gather "wherever possible with Department of Agriculture representatives, Extension Service agents, vocational teachers, State officials, farm organizations, and others concerned, in order to discuss ways and means of insuring for the year 1943 the maximum production of vital foods for every farm in this country."

The task of launching this program of mobilization on January 12 was given to the USDA War Boards, particularly those at the county level. One rural weekly said that its local War Board had been notified by the Secretary that its members must give "100 percent of their time and energy, if it is needed, to mobilize farmers and assist them in every way possible to reach their 1943 war production goals." 4/

Less than one-third of the papers carried notices that representatives of various USDA agencies at the county level attended district meetings at which the county war boards met with the State organization to work out plans for Farm Mobilization Day. Nine papers carried articles planning for the local observance of Farm Mobilization Day, which varied from detailed preparations for community meetings throughout the county to a mere suggestion that farmers tune in on their radio to hear the President and Secretary speak on the afternoon of the 12th. Only six papers carried items which related the local observance of Farm Mobilization Day. Such observance varied widely in its nature and in the number of farmers involved.

Actually only 2 of these communities held what can be termed "successful" meetings on January 12, "successful" in the sense that they observed Farm Mobilization Day as it was implied that it should be observed in the President's proclamation. These two communities had all-out, open, dirt farmers' meetings which were given considerable publicity in the paper, for which town committees were organized to insure the cooperation of the townspeople and at which there was good attendance. These meetings discussed the local production goals and the problems facing the farmers in meeting these goals, that is, labor, machinery, and transportation; likewise, these meetings were open to round-table discussions in which the farmers themselves participated and the farm plan work sheet that each farmer was to fill out was explained in detail. Both groups listened to the national broadcasts held in connection with the meetings. Said one of these papers: "Farmers of this section are fully aware of the needs of larger farm production the coming year and interested in the program being developed by the federal government to bring it about, if the attendance at the mobilization meetings is any criterion." 5/

In addition to these two communities which seemed to go all out for farm mobilization, two others reported in their papers detailed plans for the holding of an open Farm Mobilization Day meeting for farmers of the community, but failed to report the actual meeting, its attendance, or what transpired therein. It can probably be assumed that these communities did hold meetings in view of the somewhat elaborate plans under way but just how

4/ Latimer County News-Democrat (Latimer Co., Okla.) Jan. 11, 1943.
5/ Aberdeen Times (Bingham Co., Ida.) Jan. 14, 1943.

successful such meetings were and the tone that they took was not reported. One additional newspaper reported in a brief community personal that a township Farm Mobilization Day meeting was to be held on the evening of January 19, one week later than the date set aside. All neighborhood leaders were requested to attend and a special invitation was issued to all of the farmers of the township and the local businessmen. The same community reported a meeting held on the 12th at one of the rural school-houses at which "about 50 farmers" attended and participated "in open discussion of the planned intensified Food for Victory program this year."^{6/}

In one California county the members of the Western Cooperative Dairymen's Union observed Farm Mobilization Day in cooperation with members from surrounding counties of the San Joaquin Valley. Members of the USDA War Board, PSA and OPA were guests. This meeting was exceedingly well attended and the farmers seemed highly alert and aware of the problems facing them in meeting production goals. Among other things the farmers pledged themselves to cooperate 100 percent with the government to produce all possible milk for victory and to study further problems facing the milk producers in meeting their production goals. This meeting should probably be put in the same category as the two all-out Farm Mobilization Day meetings mentioned above except that it was limited in its attendance to a specific organization.

Two communities reported the observance of Farm Mobilization Day by a closed meeting of members of the USDA War Board, AAA community committeemen, and in one case, a few selected leaders of agriculture. These meetings were not open to the farmers themselves and can hardly be considered in the "spirit" of Mobilization Day, although they were termed Mobilization Day meetings in their local newspapers. One other community had a meeting which might be put in this class. The annual meeting of its county board of agriculture was held on the evening of the 12th and the write-up mentioned in passing that "this also happens to be Mobilization Day for farmers all over the Nation to discuss problems of production for 1943."^{7/}

Finally, two papers carried suggestions by the local War Board urging the farmers of the community to listen to the radio program that was to be directed to them on Farm Mobilization Day.

AAA Farm-to-Farm Sign Up and Other Meetings Relating to Farm Production.

The awareness of and participation on the part of the various rural communities in the production mobilization campaign, however, should be measured not only in terms of the actual observance of January 12 as Farm Mobilization Day but should also be considered from the standpoint of follow-up plans for the signing up of the farmers for production goals and other meetings held for the purpose of aiding the farmers in meeting these goals.

^{6/} Knightstown Banner (Henry Co., Ind.) Jan. 15, 1943.

^{7/} Salem Sunbeam (Salem Co., N.J.) Jan. 6, 1943.

The AAA community committeemen were given the job of signing up the farmers of their communities for production goals and of aiding them in filling out their farm plans and farm plan work sheets which were to serve as the "individual operator's production blueprint" and record the farmers' needs for labor, machinery, and the like for the year.

Twelve papers read for this period carried articles indicating that the community was engaged in the sign-up of farmers for production goals and the filling out of farm plans and farm plan work sheets. More specifically, seven indicated that the AAA community committeemen were in the process of contacting the individual farmers. Three were holding sign-up meetings rather than the farm-to-farm survey, one of these being conducted at the same time and place that the No. 2 Ration Book was being issued. Two additional newspapers spoke of the sign-up of farmers for production goals and the filling out of farm plans but seemed to indicate that the farmers had to contact the War Boards themselves rather than the community committeemen making the farm-to-farm survey. Most of the articles indicated that the sign-ups were moving according to schedule and one paper asked farm women to volunteer to assist the community committeemen in getting the needed data.

Another indication of the extent of participation of the rural communities in the all-out production mobilization campaign was the holding of meetings for farmers to help them meet their production goals. Two-thirds of the communities reported meetings for farmers which had as their theme a discussion of production goals, ways of meeting such goals, technical production aids, and factors serving as obstacles to all-out food production. In one-half of these communities such meetings were sponsored by the Extension Service, two by FFA, two by AAA, and the remainder by miscellaneous private organizations. The Extension Service, for example, sponsored a series of five groups of meetings in one community during January, February and March at which speakers from the State college advised specific groups of producers on ways of increasing their production through improved farming practices. In another community the Extension specialists planned a meeting in cooperation with the USDA War Boards and AAA county and community personnel to discuss plans for '43 food for freedom goals and ways and means of achieving such goals. The FFA sponsored meetings were of FFA borrowers at which '43 production goals and the current problems facing farmers were discussed in detail. In one of the AAA sponsored meetings, "two counties for the first time met jointly to discuss the agricultural situation." g/

The other meetings held in conjunction with food production in various counties included one called by the Western Cooperative Dairyman's Union which was a local follow-up of the larger meeting of this organization held on Farm Mobilization Day, another by a private oil company which

showed farmers a movie on the lubrication and care of farm implements; another sponsored by the Southern States Cooperative to help its members understand and meet the obstacles confronting them in food production; and finally one called by the American Legion for the community to discuss in open forum problems facing local farmers.

In addition to these meetings in which the farmers participated, such organizations as the Kiwanis and the Chamber of Commerce included on their programs speeches devoted to the farm production picture. As a matter of fact six communities reported in their papers such an awareness on the part of civic and commercial groups within the small towns of the need for townspeople to be informed and to discuss the farm production situation. In addition to such groups, of course, regular farm organizations such as the Grange and Farm Bureau tended to emphasize this problem at their meetings.

Observance of 4-H Mobilization Week

Still another aspect of the Farm Mobilization campaign sponsored by the Washington office was the observance of 4-H Mobilization Week, February 6-13. Again the President issued a proclamation setting aside the observance of this aspect of the production campaign. Its principal purposes were to expand 4-H club membership, to make youth conscious of wartime problems, and to enroll them in doing their part to aid actual farm production.

The observance of 4-H Mobilization Week was reported in eight of the papers. In these eight newspapers rural youth were urged to join 4-H clubs and enroll in wartime projects and to "feed a fighter in '43." The observance of this week in these communities for the most part was an attempt to gain more members for 4-H clubs and impress upon rural youth the increasing part they could play in meeting the farm production goals by alleviating the critical farm labor shortage. Although papers of other communities carried items throughout this period regarding the activities of 4-H clubs and their plans for the coming year, only the eight discussed 4-H Mobilization Week as such.

The Farmers Ignore National Farm Day

In addition to the setting aside of January 12 as Mobilization Day and the week of February 6-13 as 4-H Mobilization Week, the U. S. Department of Agriculture urged the holding of additional farmer meetings on the subject of 1943 production on March 8 in observance of the Tenth Anniversary of the founding of the National Farm Program. The administrator of the Food Distribution Administration sent out a memorandum to the State and county USDA War Boards asking that National Farm Day meetings be planned in all of the counties of the republic. He suggested that town folks also be urged to attend and learn what farmers have done and what help they need in meeting their 1943 production goals.

Whether it was due to insufficient publicity, an inadequate organization at the county level, or the belief on the part of the county or State officials that such a meeting was not in keeping with the busy schedules of farmers or that their attitude was such that they would be receptive to still another mobilization meeting -- whatever the reason,

only two papers recorded the observance of National Farm Day on March 8. In both of these papers farmers attended meetings which, although on the nature of social gatherings, devoted part of their programs to discussions of the farm problem in relation to production goals. Neither write-up indicated the size of the attendance. It is interesting that one of these was also one of the communities which went "all-out" in observance of Farm Mobilization Day.

Miscellaneous

In addition to the discussion above regarding the mobilization of farmers to meet their production goals, the extensive work of the Extension Service in giving technical advice to farmers through the newspaper should be pointed out. Likewise, the papers carried many routine announcements to farmers on the rationing of farm machinery and gasoline as well as instructions issued by USDA War Boards and the USES on applying for farm labor. Many such announcements sought to assure the farmer that everything was being done to help him in meeting his needs. The schools were also playing their part in the production picture, particularly in their organization of a victory corps. This, however, will be discussed in more detail at a later time.

